Chapter 7

Counselling in Pharmacy Practice: Exploring the Use of Online Counselling Interactions to Improve Medicine Use among People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

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ABSTRACT

Online interactivity is not commonly employed by patients and health professionals to solve drug related problems, and many patients have yet to explore the various possibilities available online to get counsel about the medicine they use. Online counselling is relatively easy for people to gain access to professional counsellors. It also creates an anonymous environment, which makes it easier to talk about personal problems and provides larger access to messages on preventive health care. Online facilities help provide comprehensive access to counselling by segments of the population that have barrier of access to conventional services. It is particularly useful to meet the psychosocial needs of people on long-term medication and it could be a veritable tool to support adherence to antiretroviral therapy in People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA).

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses medicine use adherence in relation to the challenges of chronically-ill patients. It also considers the plight of PLWHA in addition to the burden of stigmatisation and how online interactions could assist in coping with the challenges. The objectives of the chapter are to highlight the need for counselling services to PLWHA and to identify the communication skills required by the pharmacist for a professional online counselling relationship.

The Meaning of Counselling

According to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2010), counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction and purpose at the request of the client. It is a way of enabling choice or change or of reducing confusion. The counselling session enables the client to explore various aspects of his/her life and feelings, talking about them freely and openly in a way that is rarely possible with friends or family. By listening attentively and patiently the counsellor becomes empathetic and helps the client to see things more clearly, possibly from a different perspective. The counsellor does not judge the client but accepts and respects the client and encourages the client’s expression of feelings without becoming burdened by them.

Counselling focuses on helping the client make a rational decision and it seeks to enhance the psychological well-being of the clients so that they are able to reach their full potentials (stressaffect.com, 2009). Counselling is different from giving an instruction or an advice (Pilnick, 2004) but rather it attempts to educate and provide adequate information to guide the client. In giving advice, the giver bears more responsibility for the decision but in counselling, the client makes voluntary informed choice after complete information is given and therefore bears the responsibility. Counselling is a process and requires skill, both of which must be adapted to the specific need at hand when deployed and it is related to interpersonal communication. The skills and attitudes needed for effective interpersonal communication also apply to counselling and the skills involve care-related factors such as provision of a safe and comfortable environment, privacy and confidentiality, respect and courtesy, all of which are vital to the effective performance of even skilled professionals.

Patient Counselling in Pharmacy Practice

Patient counselling in pharmacy practice involves the provision of medication information in oral or written form to the patients or their representatives on directions for use, side effects, precautions, storage, diet, and appropriate lifestyle modifications (Palaian, Prabhuand, & Shankar, 2006; Ratna, 2008). It is an integral part of pharmacy practice as it is not feasible for the pharmacist to administer all dispensed medicines or stay with each patient all the time. It is a professional obligation in which the pharmacist provides appropriate information to help the patient achieve rational use of his/her medication for positive therapeutic outcomes. Such counselling must be patient specific in context and timing.

Counselling in pharmacy practice is used in a wide range of helping relationships and effective use of counselling skills helps in the exercise of the pharmacist’s health promotional role. Counselling represents a significant part of good pharmacy practice which is the practice of pharmacy aimed at providing and promoting the best use of drugs and other health care services and products, by patients and members of the public (Wiedenmayer, Summers, Mackie, Gous, & Everard, 2006). It helps in the actual delivery
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